

Aldous Huxley

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Aldous Huxley



Born	Aldous Leonard Huxley 26 July 1894 Godalming, Surrey, England
Died	22 November 1963 (aged 69) Los Angeles, California, United States
Resting place	Compton, Surrey, England
Occupation	Writer (fiction & non-fiction)
Notable work(s)	<i>Brave New World</i>, <i>Island</i>, <i>Point Counter Point</i>, <i>The Doors of Perception</i>

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Influenced[\[show\]](#)

Aldous Leonard Huxley (26 July 1894 – 22 November 1963) was an English writer and one of the most prominent members of the famous [Huxley family](#). He spent the later part of his life in the United States, living in Los Angeles from 1937 until his death in 1963. Best known for his novels including *[Brave New World](#)* and a wide-ranging output of essays, Huxley also edited the magazine *[Oxford Poetry](#)*, and published short stories, poetry, travel writing, and film stories and scripts.

Aldous Huxley was a [humanist](#) and [pacifist](#), and he was latterly interested in spiritual subjects such as [parapsychology](#) and philosophical [mysticism](#).^[1] He is also well known for advocating and taking [psychedelics](#).

By the end of his life Huxley was considered, in some academic circles, a leader of modern thought and an intellectual of the highest rank, and highly regarded as one of the most prominent explorers of visual communication and sight-related theories as well.^[2]

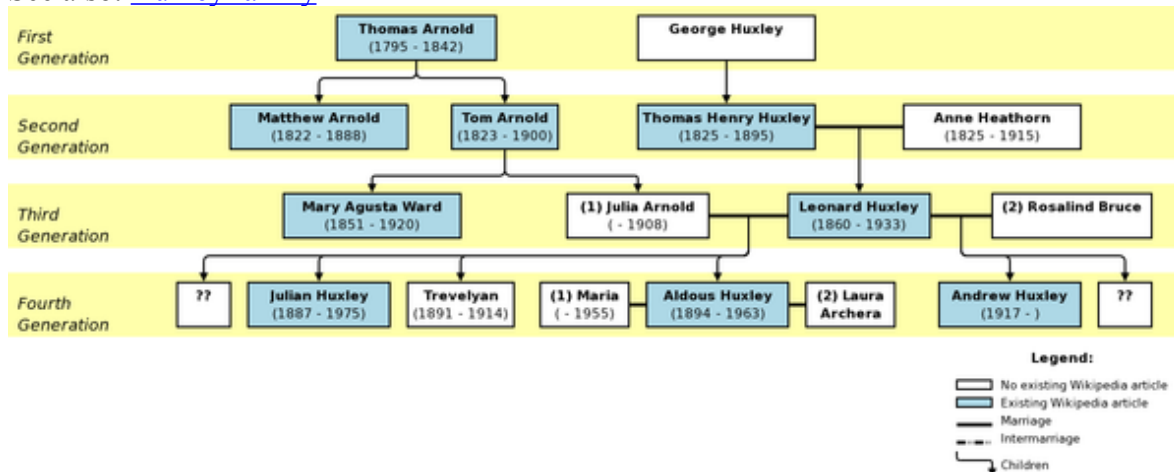
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Early life

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Aldous Huxley was born in [Godalming](#), Surrey, UK in 1894. He was the third son of the writer and schoolmaster [Leonard Huxley](#) and his first wife, Julia Arnold who founded Prior's Field School. Julia was the niece of educator [Matthew Arnold](#) and the sister of [Mrs. Humphrey Ward](#). Aldous was the grandson of [Thomas Henry Huxley](#), the zoologist, agnostic and controversialist ("Darwin's Bulldog"). His brother [Julian Huxley](#) and half-brother [Andrew Huxley](#) also became outstanding biologists. Huxley had another brother, Noel Trevelyan (1891–1914), who committed suicide after a period of [clinical depression](#).^[3]

Huxley began his learning in his father's well-equipped botanical laboratory, then continued in a school named Hillside. His teacher was his mother who supervised him for several years until she became terminally ill. After Hillside, he was educated at [Eton College](#). Huxley's mother died in 1908, when he was 14. In 1911, he suffered an illness ([keratitis punctata](#)) which "left [him] practically blind for two to three years".^[4] Aldous's near-blindness disqualified him from service in the [First World War](#). Once his eyesight recovered sufficiently, he was able to study English literature at [Balliol College, Oxford](#). In 1916 he edited [Oxford Poetry](#) and later graduated with first class honours. His brother Julian wrote,

I believe his blindness was a blessing in disguise. For one thing, it put paid to his idea of taking up medicine as a career... His uniqueness lay in his universalism. He was able to take all knowledge for his province.^[5]

Following his education at Balliol, Huxley was financially indebted to his father and had to earn a living. He taught French for a year at Eton, where Eric Blair (later known by the pen name [George Orwell](#)) and [Stephen Runciman](#) were among his pupils, but was remembered as an incompetent and hopeless teacher who couldn't keep discipline. Nevertheless, Blair and others were impressed by his use of words.^[6] For a short while in 1918, he was employed acquiring provisions at the [Air Ministry](#).

Significantly, Huxley also worked for a time in the 1920s at the technologically-advanced [Brunner and Mond](#) chemical plant in [Billingham](#), Teesside, and the most recent introduction to his famous science fiction novel [Brave New World](#) (1932) states that this experience of "an ordered universe in a world of planless incoherence" was one source for the novel.^[7]

Career

Huxley completed his first (unpublished) novel at the age of 17 and began writing seriously in his early 20s. His first published novels were social satires, beginning with [Crome Yellow](#) (1921).

Bloomsbury set



Left to right: [Bloomsbury Group](#) members - [Lady Ottoline Morrell](#), Maria Nys, [Lytton Strachey](#), [Duncan Grant](#), and [Vanessa Bell](#).

During the First World War, Huxley spent much of his time at [Garsington Manor](#), home of Lady [Ottoline Morrell](#), working as a farm labourer. Here he met several [Bloomsbury](#) figures including [Bertrand Russell](#) and [Clive Bell](#). Later, in [Crome Yellow](#) (1921) he caricatured the Garsington lifestyle. In 1919 he married Maria Nys, a Belgian woman he met at Garsington; they had one son. The family lived in Italy part of the time in the 1920s, where Huxley would visit his friend [D. H. Lawrence](#). Following Lawrence's death in 1930, Huxley edited Lawrence's letters (1933).

Works of this period included important novels on the dehumanizing aspects of scientific progress, most famously [Brave New World](#), and on pacifist themes (for example, [Eyeless in Gaza](#)). In *Brave New World* Huxley portrays a society operating on the principles of mass production and [Pavlovian conditioning](#). Huxley was strongly influenced by [F. Matthias Alexander](#) and included him as a character in *Eyeless in Gaza*.

The U.S.

In 1937, Huxley moved to [Hollywood, California](#) with his wife Maria, son Matthew, and friend [Gerald Heard](#). He lived in the U.S., mainly in southern [California](#), until his death, but also for a time in [Taos, New Mexico](#), where he wrote [Ends and Means](#) (published in 1937). In this work he examines the fact that although most people in modern civilization agree that they want a world of "liberty, peace, justice, and brotherly love", they have not been able to agree on how to achieve it.

Heard introduced Huxley to [Vedanta](#) (Veda-Centric Hinduism), meditation, and [vegetarianism](#) through the principle of [ahimsa](#). In 1938 Huxley befriended [J. Krishnamurti](#), whose teachings he greatly admired. He also became a Vedantist in the circle of Hindu [Swami Prabhavananda](#), and introduced [Christopher Isherwood](#) to this circle. Not long after, Huxley wrote his book on widely held spiritual values and ideas, [The Perennial Philosophy](#), which discussed the teachings of renowned mystics of the world. Huxley's book affirmed a sensibility that insists there are realities beyond the generally accepted "five senses" and that there is genuine meaning for humans beyond both sensual satisfactions and sentimentalities.

Huxley became a close friend of Remsen Bird, president of [Occidental College](#). He spent much time at the college, which is in the [Eagle Rock](#) neighborhood of Los Angeles. The college appears as "Tarzana College" in his satirical novel [After Many a Summer](#) (1939). The novel won Huxley that year's [James Tait Black Memorial Prize](#) for fiction.^[8] Huxley also incorporated Bird into the novel.

During this period Huxley earned some Hollywood income as a writer. In March 1938, his friend [Anita Loos](#), a novelist and screenwriter, put him in touch with [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer](#) who hired Huxley for *[Madame Curie](#)* which was originally to star [Greta Garbo](#) and be directed by [George Cukor](#). (The film was eventually filmed by MGM in 1943 with a different director and stars.) Huxley received screen credit for *[Pride and Prejudice](#)* (1940) and was paid for his work on a number of other films, including *[Jane Eyre](#)* (1944).

However, his experience in Hollywood was not a success. When he wrote a synopsis of *[Alice in Wonderland](#)*, [Walt Disney](#) rejected it on the grounds that "he could only understand every third word".^[9] Huxley's leisurely development of ideas, it seemed, was not suitable for the movie moguls, who demanded fast, dynamic dialogue above all else. For Dick Huemer, during the 1940s, Huxley went to the first of a five meetings' session to elaborate the script of *Alice in Wonderland* but never came again.^[10] For author John Grant, although the movie's character, the Caterpillar displays some characteristics familiar from Huxley's discussion of his experiments with [hallucinogens](#), Huxley's contribution to the movie is nonexistent.^[11]

On 21 October 1949, Huxley wrote to [George Orwell](#), author of *[Nineteen Eighty-Four](#)*, congratulating Orwell on "how fine and how profoundly important the book is". In his letter to Orwell, he predicted:

Within the next generation I believe that the world's leaders will discover that infant conditioning and narco-hypnosis are more efficient, as instruments of government, than clubs and prisons, and that the lust for power can be just as completely satisfied by suggesting people into loving their servitude as by flogging them and kicking them into obedience.^[12]

Post World War II

After the Second World War, Huxley applied for United States citizenship. His application was continuously deferred on the grounds that he would not say he would take up arms to defend the U.S. He claimed a philosophical, rather than a religious objection, and therefore was not exempt under the [McCarran Act](#).^[13] So, he withdrew his application. Nevertheless, he remained in the country, and in 1959 he turned down an offer of a [Knight Bachelor](#) by the [Macmillan government](#). During the 1950s Huxley's interest in the field of [psychical research](#) grew keener, and his later works are strongly influenced by both mysticism and his experiences with psychedelic drugs.

In October 1930, the English occultist [Aleister Crowley](#) dined with Huxley in Berlin, and to this day rumours persist that Crowley introduced Huxley to [peyote](#) on that occasion. He was introduced to [mescaline](#) (considered to be the key active ingredient of peyote) by the psychiatrist [Humphry Osmond](#) in 1953.^[14] Through Dr. Osmond, Huxley met millionaire [Alfred Matthew Hubbard](#) who would deal with [LSD](#) on a wholesale basis.^[15] On 24 December 1955, Huxley took his first dose of [LSD](#). Indeed, Huxley was a pioneer of self-directed psychedelic drug use "in a search for enlightenment", famously taking 100 micrograms of LSD as he lay dying. His psychedelic drug experiences are described in the essays *[The Doors of Perception](#)* (the title deriving from some lines in the book *[The Marriage of Heaven and Hell](#)* by [William Blake](#)), and *[Heaven and Hell](#)*. Some of his writings on psychedelics became frequent reading among early [hippies](#)^[citation needed]. While living in Los Angeles, Huxley was a friend of [Ray Bradbury](#). According to Sam Weller's biography of Bradbury, the latter was dissatisfied with Huxley, especially after Huxley encouraged Bradbury to take psychedelic drugs.

Association with Vedanta

Beginning in 1939 and continuing until his death in 1963, Huxley had an extensive association with the [Vedanta](#) Society of Southern California, founded and headed by [Swami Prabhavananda](#). Together with [Gerald Heard](#), [Christopher Isherwood](#), and other followers he was initiated by the Swami and was taught meditation and spiritual practices.

In 1944 Huxley wrote the introduction to the "Bhagavad Gita: The Song of God",^[16] translated by Swami Prabhavanada and Christopher Isherwood, which was published by The Vedanta Society of Southern California.

From 1941 through 1960 Huxley contributed 48 articles to *Vedanta and the West*, published by the Society. He also served on the editorial board with Isherwood, Heard, and playwright John van Druten from 1951 through 1962.

Huxley also occasionally lectured at the Hollywood and Santa Barbara Vedanta temples. Two of those lectures have been released on CD: *Knowledge and Understanding* and *Who Are We* from 1955.

After the publication of *The Doors of Perception*, Huxley and the Swami disagreed about the meaning and importance of the LSD drug experience, which may have caused the relationship to cool, but Huxley continued to write articles for the Society's journal, lecture at the temple, and attend social functions.

Eyesight

With respect to details about the true quality of Huxley's eyesight at specific points in his life, there are differing accounts. Around 1939, Huxley encountered the [Bates Method](#) for better eyesight, and a teacher, [Margaret Corbett](#), who was able to teach him in the method. In 1940, Huxley relocated from Hollywood to a 40-acre (160,000 m²) *ranchito* in the high desert hamlet of [Llano](#), California, in northernmost Los Angeles County. Huxley then said that his sight improved dramatically with the Bates Method and the extreme and pure natural lighting of the southwestern American desert. He reported that for the first time in over 25 years, he was able to read without glasses and without strain. He even tried driving a car along the dirt road beside the ranch. He wrote a book about his successes with the Bates Method, *The Art of Seeing* which was published in 1942 (US), 1943 (UK). It was from this period, with the publication of the generally disputed theories contained in the latter book, that a growing degree of popular controversy arose over the subject of Huxley's eyesight.

It was, and to a noticeable extent, still is widely held that, for most of his life, since the illness in his teens which left Huxley nearly blind, that his eyesight was exceedingly poor (despite the partial recovery which had enabled him to study at Oxford). For instance, some ten years after publication of *The Art of Seeing*, in 1952, [Bennett Cerf](#) was present when Huxley spoke at a Hollywood banquet, wearing no glasses and apparently reading his paper from the lectern without difficulty: "Then suddenly he faltered—and the disturbing truth became obvious. He wasn't reading his address at all. He had learned it by heart. To refresh his memory he brought the paper closer and closer to his eyes. When it was only an inch or so away he still couldn't read it, and had to fish for a magnifying glass in his pocket to make the typing visible to him. It was an agonizing moment."^[17]

On the other hand, Huxley's second wife, [Laura Archera Huxley](#), would later emphasize in her biographical account, *This Timeless Moment*: "One of the great achievements of his life: that of having regained his sight." Here, she portrays the accomplishment as both metaphorical and considerably physiological in nature, attributing that which she cites [J. Krishnamurti](#) as naming the spirit of "freedom from the known", which she suggests that Huxley applied, non-exhaustively, in writing *The Art of Seeing* and utilizing the [Bates Method](#). After revealing a letter she wrote to the *Los Angeles Times* disclaiming the label of Huxley as a "poor fellow who can hardly see" by [Walter C. Alvarez](#), she tempers this: "Although I feel it was an injustice to treat Aldous as though he were blind, it is true there were many indications of his impaired vision. For instance, although Aldous did not wear glasses, he would quite often use a magnifying lens."^[18] Laura Huxley proceeds to elaborate a few nuances of inconsistency peculiar to Huxley's vision. Her account, in this respect, is discernibly congruent with the following sample of Huxley's own words from *The Art of Seeing*. "The most characteristic fact about the functioning of the total organism, or any part of the organism, is that it is not constant, but highly variable." Nevertheless, the topic of Huxley's eyesight continues to endure similar, significant controversy, regardless of how trivial a subject matter it might initially appear.^[19]

Personal life

He married Maria Nys (10 September 1899 – 12 February 1955), a Belgian he met at Garsington, in 1919. They had one child, [Matthew Huxley](#) (19 April 1920 – 10 February 2005), who had a career as an [epidemiologist](#). In 1955, Maria died of breast cancer.

In 1956 he married [Laura Archera](#) (1911–2007), also an author. She wrote *This Timeless Moment*, a biography of Huxley. In 1960 Huxley himself was diagnosed with laryngeal cancer, and in the years that followed, with his health deteriorating, he wrote the Utopian novel [Island](#),^[20] and gave lectures on "Human Potentialities" at the [Esalen](#) institute, which were fundamental to the forming of the [Human Potential Movement](#).

Death

On his deathbed, unable to speak, Huxley made a written request to his wife for "LSD, 100 µg, intramuscular". According to her account of his death^[21] in *This Timeless Moment*, she obliged with an injection at 11:45 am and another a couple of hours later. He died, aged 69, at 5:20 pm on 22 November 1963, several hours after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Huxley's ashes were interred in the family grave at the Watts Cemetery, home of the [Watts Mortuary Chapel](#) in Compton, a village near [Guildford](#), Surrey, England.^[22]

Media coverage of Huxley's passing was overshadowed by the [assassination of President John F. Kennedy](#), on the same day, and the death of the Irish author [C. S. Lewis](#) who also died on 22 November. This coincidence was the inspiration for [Peter Kreeft](#)'s book [Between Heaven and Hell: A Dialog Somewhere Beyond Death with John F. Kennedy, C. S. Lewis, & Aldous Huxley](#). Huxley's literary legacy continues to be represented by the literary agency headed by [Georges Borchardt](#).

Aldous Huxley's only child [Matthew Huxley](#) (1920 - 2005), was an author, anthropologist, and prominent [epidemiologist](#).^[23] Aldous Huxley is survived by two grandchildren.

Awards

- 1939 [James Tait Black Memorial Prize](#) for *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*.
- 1959 Aldous Huxley [American Academy of Arts and Letters](#) Award of Merit for *Brave New World*.
- 1962 the Companion of Literature by the [Royal Society of Literature](#).^[24]

Film adaptations of Huxley's work

- 1968 [Point Counter Point](#) BBC mini-series by Simon Raven.
- 1971 [The Devils](#) ([Ken Russell](#)) adapted Huxley's [The Devils of Loudun](#).
- 1998 [US TV adaptation of Brave New World](#)
- scheduled 2011 *Brave New World* by [Ridley Scott](#) and [Leonardo DiCaprio](#) ^[25]

Selected works

Novels

- [Crome Yellow](#) (1921)
- [Antic Hay](#) (1923)
- [Those Barren Leaves](#) (1925)
- [Point Counter Point](#) (1928)
- [Brave New World](#) (1932)

- [*Eyeless in Gaza*](#) (1936)
- [*After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*](#) (1939)
- *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944)
- [*Ape and Essence*](#) (1948)
- [*The Doors of Perception*](#) (1954)
- [*The Genius and the Goddess*](#) (1955)
- [*Island*](#) (1962)

Short story collections

- [*Limbo*](#) (1920)
- [*Mortal Coils*](#) (1922)
- [*Little Mexican*](#) (U.S. title: *Young Archimedes*) (1924)
- [*Two or Three Graces*](#) (1926)
- [*Brief Candles*](#) (1930)
- [*Jacob's Hands: A Fable*](#) (discovered 1997) co-written with [Christopher Isherwood](#)
- [*Collected Short Stories*](#) (1944)

Poetry collections

- [*Oxford Poetry*](#) (magazine editor) (1916)
- *The Burning Wheel* (1916)
- *Jonah* (1917)
- *The Defeat of Youth and Other Poems* (1918)
- *Leda* (1920)
- *Selected Poems* (1925)
- *Arabia Infelix and Other Poems* (1929)
- *The Cicadas and Other Poems* (1931)
- *Collected Poems* (1971, posthumous)

Essay collections

- *On the Margin* (1923)
- *Along the Road* (1925)
- *Essays New and Old* (1926)
- *Proper Studies* (1927)
- *Do What You Will* (1929)
- *Vulgarity in Literature* (1930)
- [*Music at Night*](#) (1931)
- *Texts and Pretexts* (1932)
- *The Olive Tree and other essays* (1936)
- [*Ends and Means*](#) (1937)
- *Words and their Meanings* (1940)
- [*The Art of Seeing*](#) (1942)
- [*The Perennial Philosophy*](#) (1945)
- *Science, Liberty and Peace* (1946)
- *Themes and Variations* (1950)
- [*The Doors of Perception*](#) (1954)
- [*Heaven and Hell*](#) (1956)
- *Adonis and the Alphabet* (U.S. title: *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*) (1956)
- *Collected Essays* (1958)
- [*Brave New World Revisited*](#) (1958)
- *Literature and Science* (1963)
- *Moksha: Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience 1931-63* (1977)
- *The Human Situation: Lectures at Santa Barbara, 1959* (1977)

Screenplays

- [*Brave New World*](#)
- [*Ape and Essence*](#)
- [*Pride and Prejudice*](#) (Collaboration. 1940)
- [*Madame Curie*](#) (Collaboration. 1943)
- [*Jane Eyre*](#) (Collaboration with [John Houseman](#). 1944)
- [*A Woman's Vengeance*](#) 1947
- Original screenplay for Disney's animated [*Alice in Wonderland*](#) 1951 (rejected) ^[26]
- [*Eyewitness in Gaza*](#) BBC Mini-series (Collaboration with [Robin Chapman](#). Aired 1971)^[27]

Travel books

- *Along The Road: Notes and essays of a tourist* (1925)
- *Jesting Pilate: The Diary of a Journey* (1926)
- [*Beyond the Mexique Bay: A Traveller's Journey*](#) (1934)

Children's fiction

- [*The Crows of Pearblossom*](#) (1967)
- *The Travails and Tribulations of Geoffrey Peacock* (1967)

Drama

- *The Discovery* (adapted from Francis Sheridan, 1924)
- *The World of Light* (1931)
- *Mortal Coils - A Play*. (Stage version of *The Gioconda Smile*, 1948)
- *The Genius and the Goddess* (stage version, co-written with Betty Wendel, 1958)
- *The Ambassador of Captripedia* (1967)
- *Now More Than Ever* (Huxley's lost play discovered in 2000 in the University of Münster, Germany's Department of English Literature)

Articles written for *Vedanta and the West*

- Distractions (1941)
- Distractions II (1941)
- Action and Contemplation (1941)
- An Appreciation (1941)
- The Yellow Mustard (1941)
- Lines (1941)
- Some Reflections of the Lord's Prayer (1941)
- Reflections of the Lord's Prayer (1942)
- Reflections of the Lord's Prayer II (1942)
- Words and Reality (1942)
- Readings in Mysticism (1942)
- Man and Reality (1942)
- The Magical and the Spiritual (1942)
- Religion and Time (1943)
- Idolatry (1943)
- Religion and Temperament (1943)
- A Note on the Bhagavatam (1943)
- Seven Meditations (1943)
- On a Sentence From Shakespeare (1944)
- The Minimum Working Hypothesis (1944)
- From a Notebook (1944)

- The Philosophy of the Saints (1944)
- That Art Thou (1945)
- That Art Thou II (1945)
- The Nature of the Ground (1945)
- The Nature of the Ground II (1945)
- God In the World (1945)
- Origins and Consequences of Some Contemporary Thought-Patterns (1946)
- The Sixth Patriarch (1946)
- Some Reflections on Time (1946)
- Reflections on Progress (1947)
- Further Reflections on Progress (1947)
- William Law (1947)
- Notes on Zen (1947)
- Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread (1948)
- A Note on Gandhi (1948)
- Art and Religion (1949)
- Foreword to an Essay on the Indian Philosophy of Peace (1950)
- A Note on Enlightenment (1952)
- Substitutes for Liberation (1952)
- The Desert (1954)
- A Note on Patanjali (1954)
- Who Are We? (1955)
- Foreword to the Supreme Doctrine (1956)
- Knowledge and Understanding (1956)
- The "Inanimate" is Alive (1957)
- Symbol and Immediate Experience (1960)

Other

- *An Encyclopedia of Pacifism* (editor) (1937)
- [*The Devils of Loudun*](#) (1953)
- [*Grey Eminence*](#) (1941)
- *Pacifism and Philosophy* (1994)
- [*The Politics of Ecology* \(1962\)](#) (text)
- *Selected Letters* (2007)

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- Raymond Fraser, George Wickes (Spring 1960). "[Interview: Aldous Huxley: The Art of Fiction No. 24](http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4698/the-art-of-fiction-no-24-aldous-huxley)". *The Paris Review*. <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4698/the-art-of-fiction-no-24-aldous-huxley>.
- [Portraits at the National Portrait Gallery](#)
- [BBC discussion programme *In our time*: "Brave New World". Huxley and the novel. 9 April 2009. \(Audio, 45 mins\)](#)
- [BBC *In their own words* series. 12 October 1958. \(Video, 12 mins\).](#)
- ["The Ultimate Revolution" \(talk at UC Berkeley, 20 March 1962\)](#)
- [Huxley interviewed on *The Mike Wallace interview* 18 May 1958. \(Video\)](#)
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